

I Am a Teacher Who is Also a Student

Lubna Ahmed



All of us are.....all good teachers are ones who are good students.....always on the lookout to learn new facts and new ways of handling students. That's what keeps them on their toes and makes their job interesting.

Actor. Performer. Director. Guide. Counsellor. Facilitator. Role model. Mentor. Guru. Multi-tasker. Life coach. Mediator. Manager. Leader. Agony aunt. Communication skills, convincing skills, oratory skills and so on. The list is endless, and we are talking about just one person – A teacher.

Many roles – one person-all rolled into one.

The one person who is expected to play these roles is the school teacher. The challenge faced by teachers today is how well the roles are synergised to finally enable efficacy in the teaching - learning experience.

So neatly put, so easily said, and yet so tough to implement.

I have attempted to recreate my journey of ten years as a school teacher and tried to put on paper the insights and experiences gained which have shaped my personality and helped me grow professionally. In this article I have referred specifically to the experiences in the classroom.

Expectations from a Teacher

A teacher has to be a good theatre actor and have a loud and clear voice to capture the students' attention. Her performance in the class should enable the students get interested in the subject. She should be able to direct and facilitate the students in the process of learning. In the half-hour or forty minutes provided, the teacher has to ensure that the objectives set for the day are met and the students learn the subject as well as imbibe good values.

Every aspect of the teacher – from her personality, her dress sense, her communication skills, even her patience level, are observed and scrutinised by students. The teachers are constantly judged on these.

One should not forget the ratio, which is it is forty to

one or fifty to one or sometimes even sixty to one. One being the teacher and forty being students. And if the class is, say, 10th, 11th or 12th then the students are as tall or maybe taller than you (also stronger). Dealing with such classes requires skills of leadership and high degree of maturity. Shouting, scolding and getting emotional in these classes will only make matters worse. A tough deal indeed.

I have been in this profession for ten years now but I still feel that I am far from perfect. I am still trying to learn and to hone my skills to become a better teacher: each year each month each day and each teaching period when I teach students the core subject skills and interact with them, I learn a new aspect of dealing with my students and enhancing the teaching learning process.

My experiences and challenges and what I have learnt from them

My experiences, some of which I am sharing here, are in the form of some key incidents or challenges which I have faced over the past 10 years which have shaped my performance in class, behaviour towards student-learners and given me the impetus to change and evolve.

The other day I entered my class to teach trigonometry and observed that they did not seem to be in a mood to learn. One person passed a comment and everyone started laughing. Instead of reprimanding and giving a lecture on respecting teachers I decided to start the class and ignore their behaviour. So I introduced my topic differently. This would serve two purposes, divert the students' attention and bring them to the learning mode. I asked them if they could find the height of the school building without touching it or going near it. The question set them thinking and I gave them time to ponder over it. I then said that the topic to be learnt will teach them how to do precisely that. It caught their attention and I could proceed with my class.

My learning: draw attention away from negativity and move towards positivity

During one classroom session I noticed a student

yawn (this usually happens in the last two periods of the day), then another and then another one... ..I realised that it was my lecture which was doing it. I had been speaking nonstop for about 10-12 minutes and that's way more than the average student's attention span. So I stopped, just completely stopped talking. The students noticed the silence. I got the attention once again and this time I decided to continue teaching by questioning them, encouraging them to participate and arrive at conclusions. I helped them answer the question by providing keyword as hints and praising them when they got it right. This motivated the students to learn and helped in achieving the learning objectives of the day.

My learning: student participation in the learning process helps break the monotony and makes teaching learning process effective

Each learner or student learns at his/her own pace and we cater to a mixed crowd. My concept introduction session always starts from simple to complex. For example, while teaching algebra to class 9, I revise and recapitulate the concepts done in earlier classes, say classes 6, 7 and 8. This way the students relate better to the subject and learn the topic better. Use of multimedia tools such as computers and the readymade modules also helps improve learning.

My learning: always keep in mind the student mix during classroom session. Keep adapting your teaching method accordingly.

A few years back, I took feedback from my class. I asked them to write two things which they liked about their teachers and two things which they disliked. A lot of answers were predictable and expected but I was surprised that many of them wrote that one of the teachers would get angry and shout at them. They also mentioned that the teacher was very good but got angry too often. I guessed they were talking about me. This worried me because the students felt this strongly enough to mention it. I realised that I should have kept my emotions in check as it was affecting the students.

My learning: A scolding from a teacher distracts the students from learning. Teachers should try and provide the students a 'happy' atmosphere.

At a staff meeting one day, our Principal asked

me if I had completed an assignment. I had not. I expected a reprimand, in front of all teachers and felt ashamed, in fact I wanted to sink to the centre of the earth (figuratively speaking, of course). Instead, she looked at me and said that she understood that I had been busy handling other responsibilities and asked me by when she could get it. Her smile and her encouraging words put me at ease and made me respect her more. I completed the assignment with lot more interest and enthusiasm and I think I did a far better job. I implemented this learning in the classroom. Students are expected to complete their work daily for all subjects. I now check their load and accordingly give them work. While they are solving questions, I take a round of the class and try and encourage them to do better by giving positive verbal comments like "Well done", "Yes you are right....but correct this". Even if it one line which they have written correctly or even partially correctly.

My learning: The teachers encouraging smile, or an understanding look goes a long way in improving a teacher-student relationship leading to better learning.

Mathematics is a subject which cannot be memorised. It requires drill and practice – lots of it, which in turn the drill and practice help internalise concepts. After I complete a classroom session I expect the students to go home and practice the concepts learnt that day. Some students do it, but most don't and so are not prepared to 'digest' another concept. If this cycle continues then over a period of time they lose control of the subject. I then ask them to spend just fifteen minutes on the subject - and not a minute more. That has worked to a certain extent.

My Learning: still learning. I need to work more in order to 'inspire' students to learn.

To conclude

There is a Japanese word kaizen, which means continuous improvement in small increments. My journey so far has been a series of 'small lessons', learning from which have helped enhance my skills and become a better teacher and a human being.

And my journey as a teacher continues and as they say, Learning Never Stops....

Lubna is a post graduate in Mathematics from Delhi University. After graduation, she started working at an IT company and worked there for about 12 years. At NIIT, she handled a variety of roles from being a senior group leader to heading the Quality Control. She took a break in order to take care of her family. During this time she also completed her PG in Mathematics and B.Ed. She is now working as a Mathematics teacher at a leading school in Greater Noida. She may be contacted at lubnaafaque@yahoo.com